

Habitat Herald

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In This Issue:

- 1** Animal Tracks and Traces
- 2** A Word from the President
- 5** Stream Monitoring Classes & Programs
- 7** Mark Your Calendar
- 8** The Christmas Bird Count
- 9** The LWC Environmental Policy
- 12** Update on Banshee Reeks

www.loudounwildlife.org

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Animal Tracks and Traces

— by *Patty Selly*

A rabbit seeks shelter in a tangle of briars. The scatter of feathers below a tree reveals a place where a hawk had a meal. A pile of scat reveals the territory of a red fox and provides a clue to the nearby entrance to its den.

Winter is my favorite time to look for evidence of animals and their activities. If you know what to look for and where to look, the fields and forests and the clues within them can tell stories about the lives of the animals that live there. Developing an eye for nature observation involves knowing how to find the evidence or “sign” of animals, such as tracks, droppings (scat), rubbings on trees, scent markings, and other clues. Learning how to identify these signs and how to discover their meaning opens doors to a whole new world of animal behavior.

When going out in search of animal signs, a few things you may wish to bring along are a ruler for measuring scat or track size (or, even easier, a string with inches marked on it), a small notebook for field notes, and a good field guide to tracks. My favorite is the Stokes’ guide, *Animal Tracking and Behavior*. This informative book contains illustrations of scats and tracks and provides natural history on common mammals found throughout Eastern North America. Stokes’ *A Guide to Nature in Winter* is another of my favorites. A nice pocket-sized guide is the *Track Finder* by Dorcas Miller. This is a small, simple guide that is particularly easy for children to use.

Animal footprints are always exciting to find. Look for tracks in freshly fallen snow, muddy shorelines, creek edges, and in shallow pools of water. Tracks can tell you what kind of animal had been around and, in some cases, what it was doing. A morning after a rain or snow is a great time to explore.

The tracks of the white-tailed deer are easy to identify. Deer are hooved animals, and their tracks look like narrow, upside-down hearts, separated in half lengthwise. Deer tracks are left in long lines, and, because of their pointy, rather sharp hooves, the trail they leave is often distinct enough to follow for some distance.



Continued on page 3

The Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy is a non-profit 501(c)(3) group of volunteers who share a common goal of protecting and perpetuating natural habitats for the benefit of both people and wildlife. Contributions are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by the law.

The Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy Board meets the first Tuesday of each month. Board meetings are open to all members. For more information, or to suggest topics for discussion at upcoming meetings, contact Phil Daley.

You can also visit us at:

www.loudounwildlife.org

A WORD FROM THE PRESIDENT:

It's

snowing, and one thing about a good snow is that it really increases the number of visitors to the bird feeders. Here I am, sitting in Ellie's recliner with my foot raised and crutches nearby, watching for some of the more unusual species to show up for the "Great Feast" of thistle, black oil sunflower seed and suet. Cardinals are beautiful any time of the year, but they are at their very best in the snow. The Goldfinches and House Finches seem to be our most persistent visitors, followed by the Titmice, Carolina Chickadees, Juncos and White-throated Sparrows. Two Downy Woodpeckers and several White-breasted Nuthatches are busy on the trunk of the maple tree, but I haven't seen our Brown Creeper in over a week — a neat little bird, hope he is okay. I just spotted a Song Sparrow and two White-crowned Sparrows at the far feeder, mixed in with the Juncos and White-throats — nice variety! Has anyone seen an Evening Grosbeak yet this year? This is one of our favorites, which comes in groups for a few days and then disappears. Nevertheless, I haven't seen one in several years now. Despite the snow, or maybe because of it, I just counted more than 40 Vultures circling above our neighbor's field — five of them were Blacks, and the rest all of the Turkey variety. Enough!

I talked to Joe Coleman yesterday about the Central Loudoun Christmas Bird Count. It sounds as if we had another good year, in spite of the threat of snow and frozen ponds that reduced the waterfowl sightings significantly. Thanks to all those who volunteered and especially to Paul Miller and his group who covered for me. If you have never participated in this fun, annual event, or the summer butterfly count, you may want to join us — NO EXPERIENCE REQUIRED. We all like to help

Continued on page 4

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Animal Tracks...Continued from page 1



House Cat

Finding tracks that resemble dog or cat paw prints is not unusual. When you find a familiar paw print with a large heel pad and four toe pads, you can narrow it down to the dog or cat family right away. If you find a track that includes claw marks, you are looking at tracks from some member of the canine family (felines have retractable claws, which will not show up in a track). Your next clue to which member of the family has left a track is the habitat you are in. If it is a very developed, urban setting, chances are you are looking at domestic dog prints. If you are in a more rural setting, you could be looking at fox prints, although there are feral (half-wild) dogs in the county. You'll need more information to determine which animal left the tracks.



Dog

Fox tracks look like typical dog or cat prints. For this reason, fox tracks are often confused with those of cats or small dogs. However, a fox's track is larger than a cat's and smaller than a medium-sized dog's. If you have a trail of tracks, that can help. Red foxes are known for their distinctive gait — they place one hind foot directly in the place where the opposite front foot was, a gait known as “perfect-stepping.” It results in a single line of tracks.



Red Fox

H Another very common mammal here in Loudoun County is the raccoon. Raccoon tracks are easy to remember; they look like miniature hands. The raccoon's front tracks are 2-3 inches long, and their rear tracks are slightly longer, about 3-4 inches long. Raccoons tend to “waddle,” so their front and hind tracks will often overlap. Raccoon tracks will most commonly be found in marshy areas, in woods, and near streams.



Raccoon

Smaller tracks could belong to other common animals found throughout the county: squirrels, rabbits, mice, and voles are active all winter. If you find tracks that look like tiny (1 ½ to 2 inches) handprints with long fingers, you may be looking at the tracks of the gray squirrel. Gray squirrels leave tiny handprint-like impressions with their front feet and larger, longer prints with their back feet. Rabbit tracks appear as two tiny front paw prints with two larger rear prints in front. Rabbits tend to “gallop” with the rear feet landing in front of the front feet as the animal moves. Mice and voles leave tiny, light tracks that look like miniature cat or dog prints. Voles have visible claws, however, and mice do not.



Grey Squirrel



Rabbit Track Pattern

But what if the track you are checking out is not very clear? Or what if the habitat you are in could be inhabited by *any* of the animals mentioned here? You need other clues to find out more about the animal you are tracking, such as food leavings, scent marks, trampled vegetation, and droppings (scat).

Next to tracks, scat is perhaps the easiest way to learn who your animal neighbors are. Each species leaves behind a distinct type of scat, containing remains of what they have recently eaten. This can be a terrific way to learn about food preferences, as well as relative abundance of species.

Deer scat is somewhat easy to identify, appearing as small “bullet-shaped” pellets often found in small piles or compressed clumps. It can be found anywhere white-tailed deer can be found: meadows, fields, forest edges, and woodlands. Deer scat is sometimes mistaken for the scat of the eastern cottontail rabbit, which leaves small piles of flattened spheres. The eastern cottontail usually leaves fewer pellets, which are never compressed like those of the deer may be. Since both of these animals forage on a variety of vegetation, their scat will contain bits of plant matter and fibers.

Foxes leave droppings that appear like those of a dog. Fox scat is generally 3-4 inches long with pointed ends, but it is generally smaller in diameter than dog droppings and will contain recognizable bits of fur, hair, and sometimes seeds. Foxes are omnivores (consumers of both plants and animals), so there will be variation in the contents of their scat. In winter, foxes generally eat small mammals, but in summer and fall, their scat will contain more seeds and

Continued on page 4

A Word...*Continued from page 2*

newcomers learn more about nature, and these counts present excellent opportunities to help LWC and learn at the same time.

Speaking of time — it is that time of year when your DUES ARE DUE! Membership runs the calendar year, and your dues help us cover the cost of printing and mailing our newsletter and the many great programs we sponsor throughout the year. So, if you haven't already done so, please pay your dues now. Thanks!

When you look through this newsletter, you should note the upcoming programs we have scheduled, plus the water-monitoring workshops scheduled for this Spring — there is something for everyone. Note that most programs are free, as are the monitoring training sessions. In addition, we have bird walks every month (second Saturday) at 8:00 a.m. at Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve. These are fun for both beginner and advanced birders; all you need is an interest and a pair of binoculars. We are also planning several interesting field trips. PLEASE COME JOIN US!

Lastly, I am still searching for some enthusiastic individuals to volunteer as Board Members — one to help with publicity and another to work membership issues. I know, I know . . . I was in the military and advised not to volunteer. However, since I retired, I have found that volunteering can be a great addition in your life, especially when you work with such a fine group as LWC. Please call me if you might consider helping

**Animal Tracks...***Continued from page 3*

berry skins. Their scat is often left in very obvious places, such as the middle of hiking trails, near den entrances, or other prominent locations.

Raccoon scat looks a lot like fox's, except the scat will have blunt ends rather than pointed ends. The scat will also contain a variety of matter, including plant material, bones and fur, and will also be left in prominent locations, such as at the base of trees, serving as advertisement to other raccoons that "someone's been here." The best diagnostic is the blunt ends.

Remember when looking at scat, *never, never pick it up or touch it*. Animal scat contains a variety of parasites (some of which may even be inhaled) which can cause serious health problems. Study the scat from a distance of at least three feet. Use a stick to examine it, and do not stand directly over it.

Even if you have trouble finding scat or tracks, there are other clues to animal behavior that can be found in many habitats in Loudoun County. Nests, scraped ground, and food remains will tell you something about our wild neighbors, so take time to look for the somewhat less obvious clues to animals' presence.

In the tall grasses of hayfields and meadows, you may find patches of matted-down grasses, indicating an area where a group of deer has spent the night, sheltered from the wind. Close to the ground, among the grasses, you may find small nests filled with fibers and fur, possibly belonging to meadow voles or a cottontail rabbit. The leafless trees reveal many nests, abandoned by birds that do not use them in the winter months, or squirrel nests — leafy, "messy" clumps found in tall trees.

Large, bare patches on the ground, places where the leaves and vegetation have been scraped away, could be evidence of a male deer scent-marking the ground with urine. Smaller scrapes could be the work of wild turkeys exposing the forest floor in search of food, such as acorns and other seeds. If small piles of dirt surround an area, it could be a place where an animal such as a gray squirrel was digging up a nut. A close look at the ends of low-growing branches may reveal that a rabbit has been eating, as the ends will be nicked off sharply. Deer also relish fresh growth and will nip buds just as they are appearing in the spring. Deer, however, lack front teeth on their upper jaw and will thus shred the ends of twigs as they eat.

Continued on page 10

LOUDOUN STREAM MONITORING PROJECT

Classes and Programs

The water quality of Loudoun County's streams is integral to the well-being of local wildlife and is an indicator of overall ecosystem health. Most of Loudoun County's streams support diverse communities of aquatic life, but in the nation's third-fastest growing county, these irreplaceable resources are under daily threat of destruction and need constant vigilance. Streams and shoreline habitats provide food, shelter, and travel corridors for animals and many of the migratory bird species that make their seasonal journeys across our landscape.

Stream Monitoring classes are taught by Dave Harrelson of the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy (LWC) and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and Cliff Fairweather of Audubon Naturalist Society (ANS). As our volunteer base grows, the LWC, in partnership with ANS, Loudoun Soil and Water Conservation District and the North Fork Goose Creek and Catocin Watershed Committees, plans to establish stream monitoring teams for every watershed in Loudoun County. These program are made possible, in part, by grants from the Virginia Chesapeake Bay Restoration Fund and the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality.

Please join us for one of our sessions.

They are educational, good for the environment, and fun for the entire family.

Classes are held at the Webb Sanctuary in Clifton, VA and at the Rust Sanctuary in Leesburg, VA — *Sign up is required.*

To register for any of the classes, contact Cliff Fairweather at (703) 803-8400 or cliff@audubonnaturalist.org.

MACRO-INVERTEBRATE IDENTIFICATION I

Saturday, February 10 (10:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.) Webb — classroom

Thursday, March 8 (7:30 p.m. - 10:00 p.m.) Rust — classroom

Saturday, March 10 (10:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.) Webb — field

Benthic macro-invertebrates, boneless creatures that live under flowing water are important indicators of aquatic ecosystem health. Learn how to identify the major groups of these organisms, including aquatic insects and crustaceans, to the taxonomic level of Order (e.g., *Ephemera* or Mayflies).

MACRO-INVERTEBRATE IDENTIFICATION II — FAMILY-LEVEL IDENTIFICATION

SECTION 3: CADDISFLIES

Sunday, February 18 (1:00 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.) Rust

SECTION 4: BEETLES & TRUE FLIES

Sunday, March 4 (1:00 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.) Rust

Sunday, March 11 (1:00 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.) Webb

All stream monitors are encouraged to acquire identification skills to the family level. With these skills, we can improve our sampling protocol and evaluation of the overall health of local streams. These classes are sponsored by the Audubon Naturalist Society. Select one date for each section.

MACRO-INVERTEBRATE IDENTIFICATION REVIEW AND QUIZ

Thursday, March 22 (7:30 p.m. - 10:00 p.m.) Webb

Saturday, March 25 (1:00 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.) Webb

Saturday, March 31 (10:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.) Rust

Saturday, April 5 (7:30 p.m. - 10:00 p.m.) Rust

All stream monitors are encouraged to take this short review and quiz to test your recognition of aquatic macro-invertebrates. Team leaders must pass the quiz for recertification for the 2001 monitoring season.

STREAM MONITORING PROTOCOL PRACTICUM

Saturday, April 7 (10:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon) Webb

Sunday, April 8 (1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.) Rust

Using the data collection protocol developed for the ANS Water Quality Monitoring Project, participants will learn how to gather abiotic data (temperature, pH, and several habitat assessments) and use a D-frame net to collect stream organisms.

HABITAT ASSESSMENT

Sunday, February 25 (1:00 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.) Rust

Sunday, March 18 (1:00 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.) Webb

Using the ANS Water Quality Monitoring Project data collection protocol, participants will focus on measuring physical data and evaluating key habitat features that help identify healthy stream habitat and recognize the warning signs of declining stream quality.

PROTECTING LOUDOUN'S STREAMS AND WATERWAYS

If you are interested in becoming a stream monitor, please fill in the following form and mail it to:

Stream Monitoring Project
 c/o Loudoun Soil and Water Conservation District
 30-H Catoctin Circle, SE
 Leesburg, VA 20175

Name: _____

Street: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Phone: (H) _____ (W) _____

If neither of those streams is available, are you willing to help monitor a site

List the Classes and Dates you are interested in:

Class	1st Choice	2nd Choice

List the Stream you are interested in monitoring:

1st Choice	2nd Choice

designated by the Project?	q Yes	q No
Are you interested in being one of our Team Leaders?	q Yes	q No
Would you be interested in helping us with some of our administrative functions (typing, maintaining our database, or record-keeping)?	q Yes	q No

For more information on any of the programs please contact:

Loudoun Soil & Water Conservation District	(703) 777-2075
Loudoun Stream Monitoring Project — Fred Fox	(540) 554-4844
Audubon Naturalist Society — Cliff Fairweather	(703) 803-8400

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Space is limited for many of these programs.

Please call the designated program contact for further information and to reserve your spot.

BIRDING BANSHEE. **Saturday, February 10, 8:00 a.m.** Join the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy at the Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve near Leesburg for a bird walk. Bring binoculars. *Questions - Contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or jandkcoleman@erols.com.*

BEARS: Our Largest Wild Neighbors. **Thursday, February 22, 7:30 p.m. at the Rust Library.** Every year more of us have the pleasure of seeing black bears. Black bears have become common in the Blue Ridge Mountain sections of Loudoun County and have even been seen in Banshee Reeks and Brambleton Regional Park. While some of us find these sightings exciting, others react with fear. David Steffen of the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, who has been studying black bears for years, will discuss the natural history of bears. He will also talk about the different and sometimes conflicting public demands for managing the bear population in Virginia. Join us at this free family program sponsored by the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy.

BECOMING A BIRDER. **Saturday, February 24, 9:00 a.m. at Banshee Reeks. Sign up required - Contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or jandkcoleman@erols.com.** John Chambless, noted local birder and trip leader, introduces us to the world of bird watching in a two-hour class. He will explain how to identify birds by their field marks and songs, describing some common identification problems. He will offer suggestions on choosing binoculars, helpful books and software. The Saturday class will be followed on Sunday with a morning bird walk for all the class attendees.

HAWKS: A Driving Field Trip. **Saturday, February 24, 2:30 p.m. to dusk. Sign up required - Contact Phil Daley at 540-338-6528 or phidaley@aol.com.** We will drive the back roads of Loudoun County to find and identify the many hawks, and hopefully an owl or two, who spend the winter here.

BIRDING BANSHEE. **Saturday, March 10, 8:00 a.m.** Join the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy at the Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve near Leesburg for a bird walk. Bring binoculars. *Questions - Contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or jandkcoleman@erols.com.*

HAWKS AND OWLS: Those Fabulous Birds of Prey. **Thursday, March 22, 2001, 7:30 p.m. at the Rust Library.** Lois Napier, raptor enthusiast and educator, will bring a red-shouldered hawk, a red-tailed hawk and a screech owl to this slide show on these wonderful birds. Lois, who has had years of experience rehabilitating, banding, and observing these fabulous birds, will describe the natural history of the owls and hawks one is likely to find in our area.

BANSHEE'S BEAVERS. **Saturday, March 24, 4:00 p.m. to dusk at Banshee Reeks. Sign up required - Contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or jandkcoleman@erols.com.** Banshee Reeks includes, among its many natural wonders, a complex of beaver ponds. We will visit this complex and discuss the importance of beavers in the natural world. Besides lots of signs of beavers, there should be some early Spring wildflowers and migrant birds.

THE BLUE RIDGE CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP: A Field Trip Between the Hills. **Sunday, March 25, 4:00 p.m. Sign up required - Contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or jandkcoleman@erols.com..** Join us for an early evening walk in one of Loudoun County's most natural areas. In 1999 the Robert & Dee Leggett Foundation purchased 900 acres in the far northwestern corner of Loudoun County in order to preserve it and create the Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship. Take a walk in an area full of yesterday's memories.

BIRDING BANSHEE. **Saturday, April 14, 8:00 a.m.** Join the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy at the Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve near Leesburg for a bird walk. Please bring binoculars. *Questions - Contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or jandkcoleman@erols.com.*

REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS FROM YOUR OWN BACKYARD! **Tuesday, April 17, 7:30 p.m. at the Rust Library.** Join Caroline Seitz of *Reptiles Alive* and meet some of the most amazing wild creatures living right next to you, including: Eastern King Snake, Hognose Snake, Black Rat Snake, Corn Snake, Northern Water Snake, Snapping Turtle, Spotted Turtle, Box Turtle, Five-lined Skink, Bullfrog, Leopard Frog, American Toad, Gray Treefrog, and a Marbled Salamander. Discover how you can protect the wildlife of your own backyard. This is a free family program sponsored by the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy.



THE CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

In spite of a bad weather forecast, 53 enthusiastic people participated in the Fourth Annual Central Loudoun Christmas Bird Count, part of the 101st National Audubon Christmas Bird Count.

This year the 53 participants saw a total of 85 species, the same number as last year. The total of 18,298 individual birds seen was approximately 4,000 fewer than last year and was probably due to the weather conditions. While the day of the count was more pleasant than originally forecasted, it was still a very cold day and developed into a windy one as well. Almost no standing water was unfrozen, with both the Potomac and the Goose Creek nearly frozen solid. The team assigned to approximately six miles of the C&O Canal between White's Ferry and Edward's Ferry had to drive all the way around via Point of Rocks as the ferry was closed due to ice. In previous years, our largest counts (over 44,000 in 1998) occurred when there were large numbers of blackbirds in the area; there were very few this year.

The Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy would like to thank all of the following participants, especially the sector leaders, who made the count possible:

- | | | |
|-----------------|--------------------------|----------------|
| Sissy Altstatt | LeAnne Astin | Tom Bjorkman |
| Tom Chornock | Ron Circe | Roger Clapp |
| Joe Coleman | Karen Coleman | Connie Cook |
| Kacy Cook | Richard Cook | Phil Daley |
| John Drummond | Carol Dunham | Dave Dunham |
| Terry Dunnigan | Ann Estelow | Rob Estelow |
| Elizabeth Evans | Suzanne Felton | Kathie Hagen |
| Debbie Harrison | Bruce Hill | Jack Hugus |
| Mike Kelly | Denise Kirwan | Robert Lyon |
| Bob MacDowell | Karin MacDowell | Barbara McKee |
| Kevin McKee | Alex Merrit | Phil Merrit |
| Carole Miller | Paul Miller | Joan Nowicke |
| Kate O'Shea | Rob O'Shea | Jeff Pfoutz |
| Linda Porter | Santiago Ramirez-Alvarez | Tom Raque |
| Mike Reyman | Celia Rutt | Jerry Schaefer |
| Tammy Schwab | Darrell Schwalm | Dominic Selly |
| Patty Selly | Stanwyn Shetler | Dale Thompson |
| Jackie Thurman | Cathy Williams | |

Here are the results for this year's count (to see other counts as well as last year's results visit www.birdsource.org):

3 Great Blue Heron	cw Barn Owl	876 American Robin
4832 Canada Goose	2 Eastern Screech Owl	cw Gray Catbird
9 Wood Duck	1 Great Horned Owl	166 Northern Mockingbird
58 American Black Duck	2 Barred Owl	15 American Pipit
407 Mallard	13 Belted Kingfisher	607 Cedar Waxwing
2 Gadwall	2 Red-head Woodpecker	2530 European Starling
cw (5) Canvasback	185 Red-bell Woodpecker	281 Yellow-rumped Warbler
29 Redhead	36 Yellow-bell Sapsucker	534 Northern Cardinal

Continued on page 11

The Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy Environmental Policy

In the past year, the Board of Supervisors directed the revision of the County Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinance. These revisions are currently being developed by the Planning Commission. In support of stricter environmental standards, the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy has developed an environmental policy, which was presented to the Planning Commission in December.

Improvement of environmental protection is key to conserving natural resources for wildlife and human needs. Please read our environmental policy and send a letter or email to the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors to let them know what you think about these issues. *LOUDOUN COUNTY'S WILDLIFE NEEDS YOUR VOICE TO PROTECT THEM.*

Street address for : Loudoun County Board of Supervisors / Planning Commission
Loudoun Government Center
1 Harrison St., Leesburg, VA 20175

E-mail addresses: Loudoun Board of Supervisors loudounbos@aol.com
Loudoun Planning Commission loudounpc@co.loudoun.va.us

The Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy (LWC) is a nonprofit group of volunteers whose common goal is the protection and proliferation of healthy natural habitats for the benefit of both people and wildlife. The LWC concurs with the stated environmental goals in the draft *Loudoun County Revised General Plan* (page 2-2, paragraph 4) and believes that the Green Infrastructure is an important step in the right direction toward achieving those goals. However, we find a number of environmental issues remain inadequately addressed to ensure the sustainability of Loudoun's natural resources and ecosystem health. Therefore, the following is the LWC policy regarding the *General Plan*. These items should be incorporated into the Plan and County ordinances where appropriate.

The Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy fully supports:

- \$ Creation of a Department of Natural Resources, accountable to the County Executive, and having not only a review/oversight function, but also a strong program (i.e., outreach, education, citizen monitoring) responsibility.
- \$ Adoption of the *Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act* to protect the health of our watersheds.
- \$ Adoption of the *Virginia Stormwater Management Act* to more effectively control erosion.
- \$ Creation of a tree-save ordinance as well as other conservation guidelines to reduce water consumption and air emissions.
- \$ Preservation of more open space (parks, green ways and trails, etc.) by proffer, purchase, or easement. In regional comparisons, Loudoun County ranks low in acres of parkland and preserved open space.
- \$ Allowing only passive recreation in flood plains, stream valleys, wetlands and other environmentally sensitive areas (i.e., no golf courses, ball fields or parking lots).
- \$ Factoring into smart growth not only the consideration of existing man-built infrastructures but also watershed-based ecosystem structure.
- \$ Requiring development be "designed with nature," i.e., site plans incorporating, not destroying, the natural topography, vegetation and hydrology.
- \$ Initiation of a ground water/drinking water program to monitor the quantity and quality of our source waters.
- \$ Monitoring the quality of our surface waters, using citizen volunteers as well as county staff to collect quality-controlled data to be used locally, regionally and nationally.
- \$ Protection of streams, stream corridors and associated flood plains, wetlands and springs by requiring 50 to 100 foot buffers depending on topography, soils and land use. Channelization of buffer areas must be

Continued on page 10

Animal Tracks...*Continued from page 4*

You may notice narrow trails of worn-down vegetation, trails weaving through forest and field. These are deer trails, and once you develop the knack for seeing them, they are easy to identify. Deer will use the same routes over and over as they travel through their home ranges, eventually wearing away narrow paths or "deer runways." Other animals use them too, and if you follow one after a fresh snowfall or rain, you will find a variety of tracks and other animal signs nearby.

You might find evidence of a recent meal, such as a pile of bird feathers under a tree branch. Chances are a hawk, a fox, or even an owl ate a small songbird here. Many animals eat songbirds; however, hawks most often pluck the feathers one by one before eating, and foxes pull the feathers out in chunks before eating. You might find a grayish, hairy-looking clump known as an "owl pellet" under a tree. Owls cannot digest the bones and fur of the small rodents or birds on which they prey and will "cough up" a pellet shortly after eating. This pellet can be soaked in water, and the bones separated out to determine what the owl ate. Owls often feed and roost in the same location, so if you find an owl pellet, look up into the tree, and you may spot the owl perching there above you.

Other animals, like the chipmunk, gray squirrel and the flying squirrel, will leave piles of nutshells behind after they finish eating. Grey squirrels eat from prominent perches, such as logs, or in more urban settings, from fence posts or even picnic tables. If you find a small pile of nutshells in one of these locations, you have found a squirrel's leftovers. Chipmunks and flying squirrels are not so quick to advertise their presence, so it may take a bit of searching on the ground to find their food remains. Look at the edges of the nutshells for their tiny tooth marks.

While it is always fun to see wild animals in person, more often than not you can be rewarded immediately by looking for the evidence of wild animals' activities and habits. There are signs of animals everywhere, and once you develop the habit of looking and uncovering the clues, you are in for a real treat. I highly recommend the books mentioned above or any of the other field guides to animal tracking that are available. They all contain fine illustrations, natural history information on local wildlife, and helpful tips on animal tracking and observation.

References:

- Stokes, Donald and Lillian, Animal Tracking and Behavior, Little, Brown, and Co., 1986
 Stokes, Donald and Lillian, A Guide to Nature in Winter, Little Brown and Co., 1976
 Miller, Dorcas, Track Finder, Dorcas Miller Publications, 1981

Environmental Policy...*Continued from page 9*

prevented. In commercial areas buffers may be reduced by use of filtration systems and other methods to prevent high volume flows and pollutant contaminated runoff from entering the streams. Streams must be defined as any waterway, intermittent or perennial, that drains 70 or more acres (i.e., Fairfax County Environmental Quality Corridors). Piping of first and second order streams must be prohibited. (The draft Green Infrastructure fails to protect first order streams that have little or no flood plain.)

§ Adoption of an effective Dark Sky ordinance which will reduce light pollution and trespass in Loudoun County.

§ Determining the County's "carrying capacity," or number of houses, the natural environment can tolerate and remain environmentally sustainable. The projected 100,000 houses in the next 20 years (eight percent growth) will make maintaining sustainable ecosystems impossible.

Finally, the *Plan* must require an implementation plan and action agenda for the ordinances and requirements of the new Comprehensive Plan to be achieved. Staff must be directed to use the many new and existing tools (the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act, the Virginia Stormwater Management Act, PDRs, TMDLs, just to name a few) and grant less waivers and exceptions in order to protect our natural heritage. The costs of restoration of the environment will greatly exceed the cost of protecting the natural resources we currently enjoy but are quickly losing.

Christmas Bird Count...Continued from page 8

37 Ring-neck Duck	141 Downy Woodpecker	14 Eastern Towhee
8 Lesser Scaup	18 Hairy Woodpecker	21 American Tree Sparrow
cw (3) Greater Scaup	61 Northern Flicker	75 Field Sparrow
2 Common Goldeneye	30 Pileated Woodpecker	cw Savannah Sparrow
10 Hooded Merganser	1 Eastern Phoebe	2 Fox Sparrow
25 Common Merganser	10 Horned Lark	161 Song Sparrow
1 Ruddy Duck	325 Blue Jay	9 Swamp Sparrow
185 Black Vulture	837 American Crow	701 White-throated Sparrow
520 Turkey Vulture	18 Fish Crow	96 White-crowned Sparrow
7 Northern Harrier	166 Crow sp.	701 Dark-eyed Junco
9 Sharp-shinned Hawk	2 Common Raven	105 Red-winged Blackbird
8 Cooper's Hawk	439 Carolina Chickadee	2 Eastern Meadowlark
18 Red-shouldered Hawk	331 Tufted Titmouse	3 Rusty Blackbird
68 Red-tailed Hawk	1 Red-breasted Nuthatch	300 Common Grackle
18 American Kestrel	162 White-breasted Nuthatch	50 Brown-headed Cowbird
2 Unidentified Hawk	6 Brown Creeper	11 Purple Finch
35 Wild Turkey	122 Carolina Wren	207 House Finch
2 Common Snipe	3 Winter Wren	188 American Goldfinch
95 Ring-billed Gull	44 Golden-crowned Kinglet	211 House Sparrow
5 Herring Gull	18 Ruby-crowned Kinglet	cw= Seen the week of, but not the day of the CBC
216 Rock Dove	373 Eastern Bluebird	85 Species
439 Mourning Dove	33 Hermit Thrush	18,298 Individuals



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City, ST, Zip: _____

Phone: (H) _____ (W) _____ **E-mail:** _____

Membership Fees: (*membership runs from January 1- December 31)

q \$10 Student*	q \$30 Family*	q \$200 Individual Lifetime
q \$20 Individual*	q \$75 Corporate*	q \$300 Family Lifetime
q Additional Donation \$ _____		

The Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy is an IRS 501(c)(3) organization. Donations are tax deductible as allowed by law.

Update on Banshee Reeks

In the Spring of 1999, the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors created the Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve. Located about six miles south of Leesburg and immediately east of the Dulles Greenway Wetlands Mitigation Project, this 700-acre area is a blend of a mature, upland mixed-hardwood forest, meadows, ponds, successional fields and forests, and river bottom lands. The Goose Creek, a Virginia Scenic River, flows for two miles along the southern border of the property.

Since July, the newly formed Friends of Banshee Reeks has been working with Loudoun County Parks, Recreation and Community Services with hiring a preserve manger and developing a master plan for Banshee Reeks. The master plan, which guarantees that the natural habitats of this wonderful facility will be preserved, is almost wrapped up and should go before the Board of Supervisors for approval in the near future.

The preserve exists to protect the natural habitats and populations of Banshee Reeks, to conduct and coordinate ecological research, and to provide the public with an opportunity to enjoy and learn from this unique, reserved area.

To protect its unique environment, Banshee Reeks is open to the public **on a limited basis and by reservation only**. For reservations contact the Banshee Reeks Manager, Ron Circe, at 703-669-0316 or bansheereeks@starpower.net.

For now, the best way to see Banshee Reeks is to join us for one of our regular field trips. The Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy sponsors a monthly bird walk at Banshee Reeks every second Saturday at 8:00 a.m. In addition to the regular birds walks, the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy (www.loudounwildlife.org), the Northern Virginia Bird Club and the Friends of Banshee Reeks lead trips to Banshee Reeks.

If you are interested in more information on Banshee Reeks or in joining the Friends of Banshee Reeks, contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or jandkcoleman@erols.com.

— Joe Coleman
President, Friends
of Banshee Reeks

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appears at the top of your address label.*

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